

Windows 8 – Backup, Restore & Recovery

By John Allen

Restore and recovery options for Windows 8 are different to earlier versions of Windows, and, of course, the terminology has changed.

These are a lot of different things you can do. As a minimum you could create a Recovery Drive which contains a Custom Refresh Image, and periodically create a new Custom Recovery Image. You could also create custom System Restore points prior to doing something risky.

- **Create a Recovery Drive** - useful if you cannot boot your system.. It is best to use a USB drive
- **System Restore** – reverts your operating system and applications to a specific earlier date, while preserving your data
- **System Refresh and Custom System Refresh** – more drastic than System Restore. If you don't have a *Custom Recovery Partition file*, it resets windows as originally installed, it will retain all your data but it will delete all programs and apps that you have installed. This is similar to restoring a disk image but your data is kept. If you have made a *Custom Recovery Partition file*, your apps and programs are also kept (well, most of them are!).
- **System Reset** – more drastic than System Refresh - ALL your data programs and apps are deleted and the system is restored to its original install state. Custom Recovery partition files cannot be used for a Reset
- **Full System Image Backup** (including data) - the "Windows 7 Backup" feature which was available in Windows 8 is no longer available in 8.1 (it didn't work well anyway!).
- **File History** – maintains a real-time backup of all your data on a permanently attached USB hard disk. There can be issues with this unless you have a permanently attached backup drive. Alternatively, you can still use the free [SynchToy](#). I use a 3rd party backup program called [SecondCopy](#)
- **Storage Spaces** – If you really want to get flashy, this offers on-the-run file backup protection using either Mirror image or Parity storage (for the technically minded, a bit like RAID but uses normal fixed/USB disks). [More detailed info is here](#). <http://blogs.msdn.com/b/b8/archive/2012/01/05/virtualizing-storage-for-scale-resiliency-and-efficiency.aspx>. Instructions have not been included here.

As well as all this, your computer manufacturer may have installed a 3rd party recovery application so you can reset your computer to factory condition. In theory a Windows System Reset should achieve the same result.

Detailed Instructions

Creating and Using a Recovery Drive

Creating a Recovery Drive

When you take possession of a new PC or you haven't done this yet, it is a good idea to create a System Recovery Drive.

Have a blank USB flash drive on hand.

Using a System Recovery Drive

[See how to do it here.](#)

System Refresh

Windows 8 - Settings charm, choose *Change PC Settings*, click *General*, choose *Refresh your PC without affecting your files*, follow instructions from there.

Windows 8.1 - Settings charm, choose *Change PC Settings*, click *Update and Recovery*, click *Recovery*, choose *Refresh your PC without affecting your files*, follow instructions from there.

Note that unless you have made a *Custom Refresh Image*, your system will revert to as it was first installed and you will lose all the apps and programs that you have installed, but retain all of your data.

It is a good idea to make a *Custom Refresh Image* after you have set up your computer and installed all your software, so that will be used instead if you do a Refresh, so all the programs and apps that you have installed will not be deleted. You can also make new custom refresh images periodically.

Creating a Custom Refresh Image

Periodically you can make an updated Custom Refresh image. These images must be stored on your C drive (otherwise recovery may not work). The best way to create and manage these Custom Refresh images is to use the simple free program called *RecimgManager*. Download and install RecimgManager from <http://www.recimg.com/>. The User Manual for RecimgManager is [here](#).

For DOS heads, you can also create these using an Elevated Command Prompt. [See this article](#). It also explains how to manage multiple Custom Refresh Images.

System Reset

Using System Reset is really a last resort if you have problems that cannot be resolved by other means. It will delete ALL your data, programs, and apps and reset your system to when you first set up Windows 8.

Windows 8 - Settings charm, choose *Change PC Settings*, click *General*, choose *Remove everything and reinstall Windows*, follow instructions from there.

Windows 8.1 - Settings charm, choose *Change PC Settings*, click *Update and Recovery*, click *Recovery*, choose *Remove everything and reinstall Windows*, follow instructions from there.

System Restore

Restoring your system to an earlier date

If you have a problem with the computer, sometimes this can be overcome by restoring the computer to an earlier time. Windows normally creates a restore point whenever software or Windows updates are installed. System Restore does not delete, change or restore your personal files in My Docs/Pictures/Videos or emails. It “rolls back” your system to a particular date.

System Restore is not as drastic as a System Refresh or a System Reset, so is worth trying first if you have a system problem.

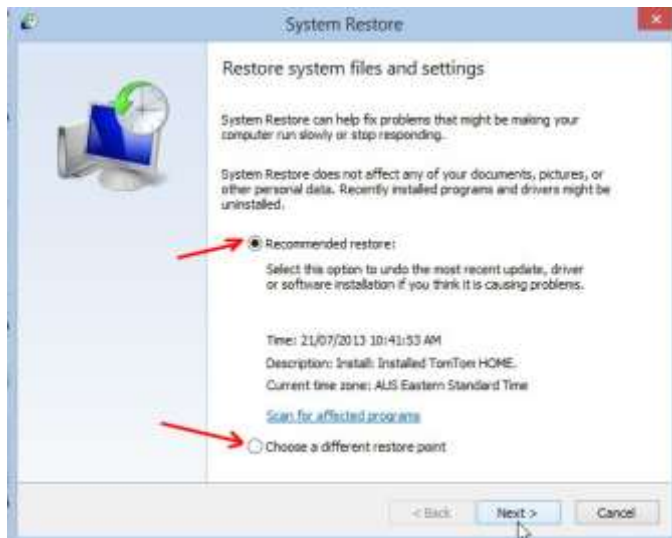
The quickest way is – on the Start Screen click the Search Charm then choose Settings and type *restore* in the search box, click on *Create a Restore Point*

This will open a new window System Properties

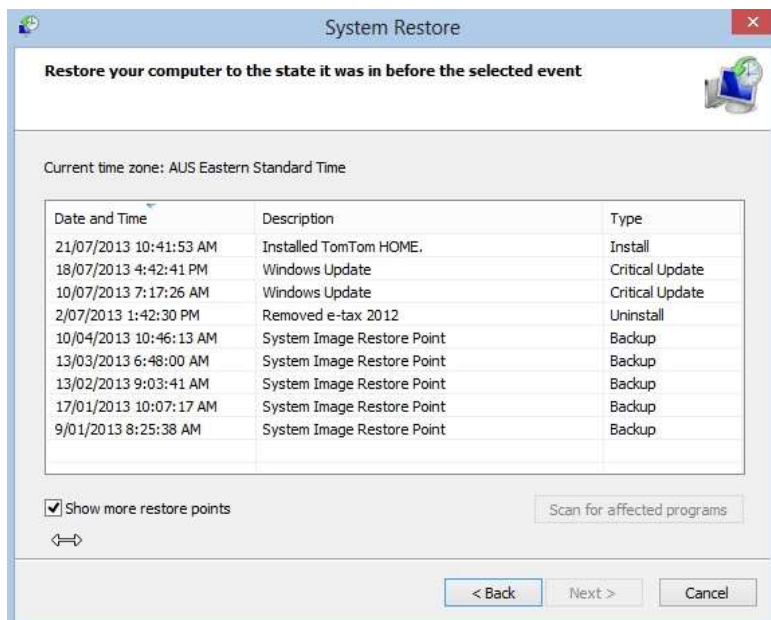


Click on System Restore, this will open up the System Restore dialogue box with a restore point listed

Check to see if it is before the trouble on your computer started, if not Click *Choose a different restore point*



Another box will open with often just one listed Click the Show more restore points, select one a while back.



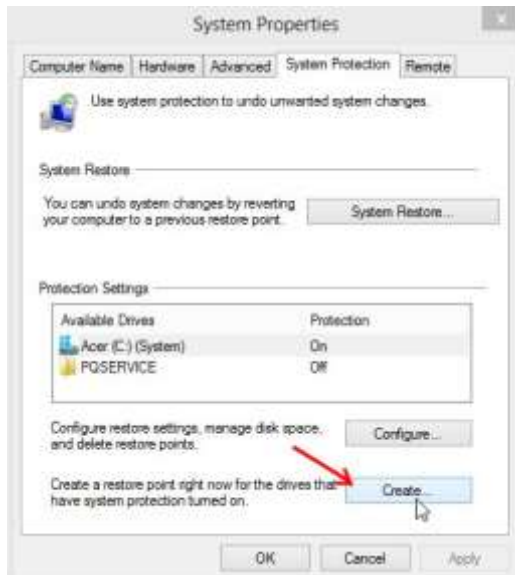
If you have updated Windows or other software, this will be lost but will be replaced on the next update. Click on the point you want to use to highlight it. And click Next It will ask you whether this is the one you want click Finish to restore it. A warning will pop up. Click Yes and the restore will begin and automatically reboot the computer when it has finished.

A short message will tell you whether it was successful after the unit reboots. Occasionally restore points fail, and the computer returns to the point you started from. You can try another, if this results in the same, there is a problem with the system and you will have to look into another solution.

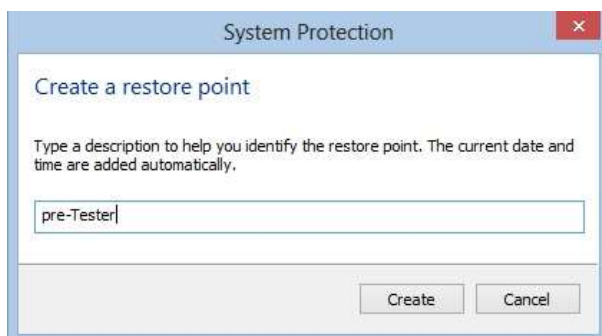
Creating a custom Restore Point

If you are going to try something experimental and of a dubious nature it is a good idea to create a restore point in case you want to revert to it.

As above, on the Start Screen click the Search Charm then choose Settings and type *restore* in the search box, click on *Create a Restore Point*. It will open the System Properties window. Click Create.



A small box will pop up to ask you what you want to call it, give it a relevant name say pre-Tester



Then then click Create, this will now appear on the restore points if you need to use it.

Some computers have System restore turned off; I recommend it be turned on. Repeat the last operation but in the System Properties choose configure and make sure the first option is selected.

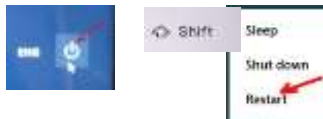
Accessing System Restore when Locked out of Windows 8

If you have set up your Windows 8 computer with a *Microsoft account* (ie using an email address), it is possible to be locked out of your computer. In this case you may be able to do a *System Restore* to a date when you could access the computer, so regaining access.

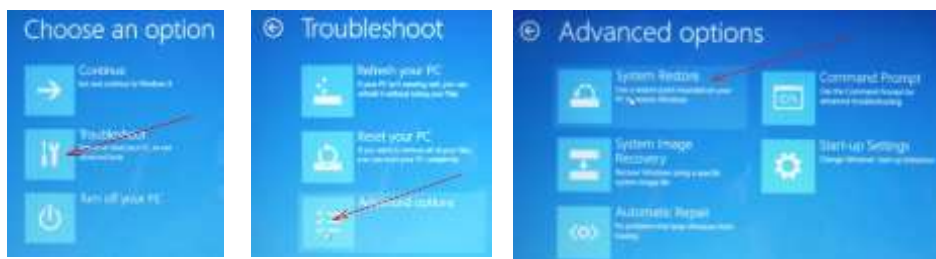
To access System Restore normally requires you to be logged in with an Admin account (the old F8 at boot-up to access Safe Mode trick does not work with Windows 8). If you have a separate *Local admin account* as well as your Microsoft account (which is strongly recommended), you can log in locally and take recovery action using your local account.

However, if you do not have a Local admin account, here is a handy trick:

1. At the login screen, click the Power icon on the bottom right of the screen. You will see the three power options - hold the left shift key down and click *Restart* to gain access to advanced start up options



2. Choose *Troubleshoot*, then *Advanced options*, then *System Restore* - you can then proceed to attempt a System Restore (which will require your password)



Warning: If possible try to use *System Restore* to recover from an issue because then you keep all your programs and data. If you are in “dire straits” you can use *Refresh* or *Reset*:

- *Refresh* will reset Windows 8 as originally installed and delete all your programs and downloaded apps, but keep your data. After this operation, you would need to reinstall all your applications like Word, email, etc
- *Reset* is more drastic – it will reset Windows 8 as originally installed, but also delete all your programs, apps, data, and users. After this operation, you would proceed like when you first set up your system.

Using File History to back up personal data

Introduction

Backing up your personal files is an essential housekeeping task. With *Windows 8 File History*, you can backup your personal files, restore some or all your files, or restore the previous version of a file you have been editing or have accidentally deleted. File History replaces the Windows 7 *Windows Backup* function.

Setting it up

To use *File History* you need a large capacity external USB hard drive connected.

File history will periodically scan your Libraries (Documents, Pictures, Music, and Videos), Desktop, Favourites, and Contacts folders, and backup any changed files. This happens hourly by default, but you can change the frequency.

Note that File History will not back up your emails. If you want your emails backed up, depending on the email client you use, you need to locate the storage folder(s) for your emails and manually back them up.

Every time any of your personal files changes, its copy will be stored on a dedicated, external storage device selected by you. Over time, *File History* builds a complete history of changes made to personal files.

The backup files are written to a large capacity external hard drive that should be always connected (and have the same drive letter). If you remove this drive for any reason, ensure that you use the *Safely Remove Hardware* icon and only remove it when it is safe to do so.

If you do remove the USB drive, *File History* temporarily reverts to a local cache on the primary hard disk (C: drive) until you reconnect the USB drive again, then the cache is flushed to the USB drive so it is then up to date. The size of this local cache is set to 5% of your primary hard disk but you can change this setting. Two things to note about this cache:

1. If it becomes full, the oldest copies of files are dropped off and lost
2. If your hard disk fails, files in the cache cannot be retrieved.

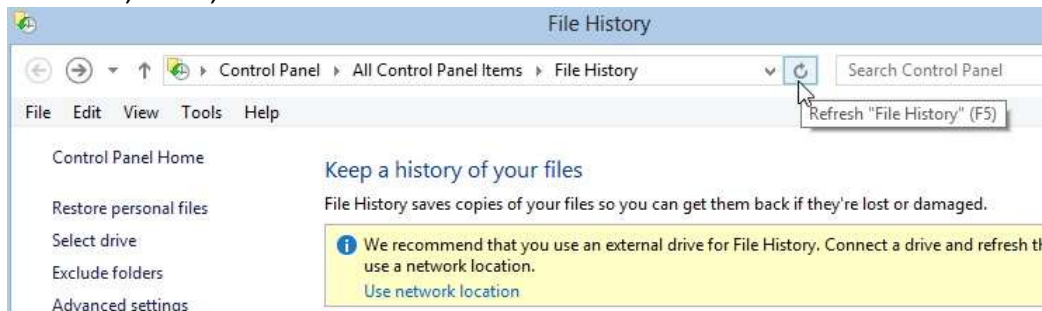
One good thing about *File History* is that the backed up files are not encrypted, so you can view them directly on any computer.

Access *File History* from *Control Panel / File History*, or search for *File History* in *Settings* in the Start screen

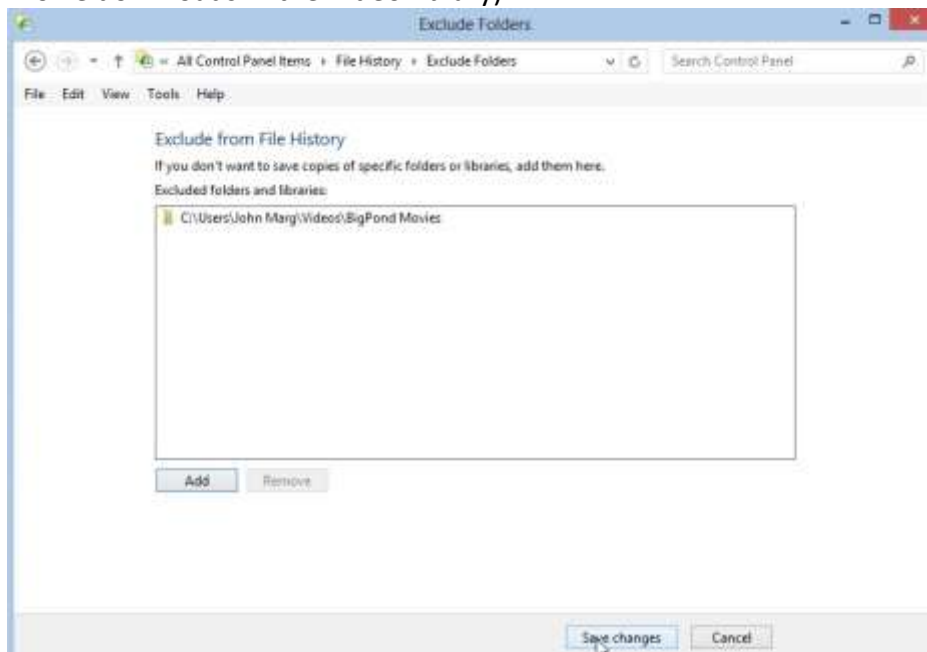
The first time you use it, it says *No file history was found* and that *File History is currently turned off*. Click on *Configure File History settings*.



When the File History window appears, if you have not already plugged in your external USB hard disk, do so, then refresh the window

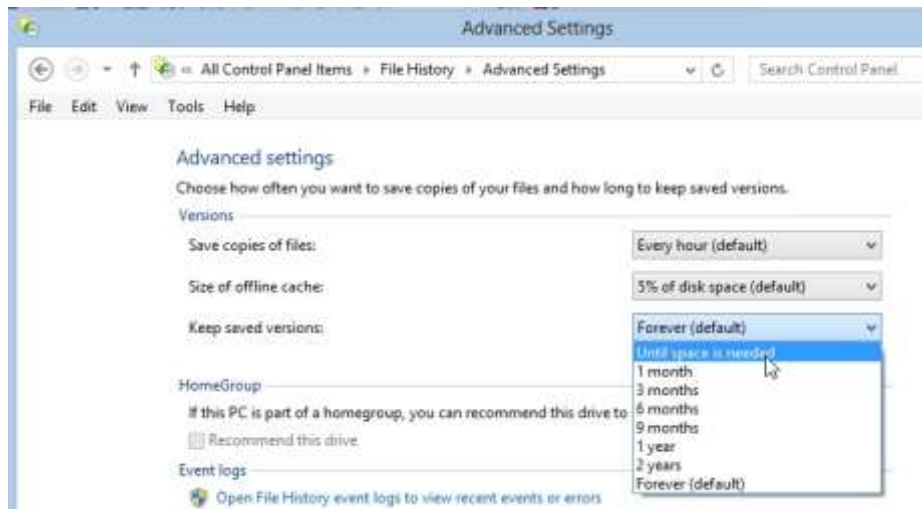


If you want to exclude any folders from being backed up, click *Exclude folders* and add each folder that you don't want backed up then *Save changes* (for example, I exclude Bigpond Movie downloads in the Video library).

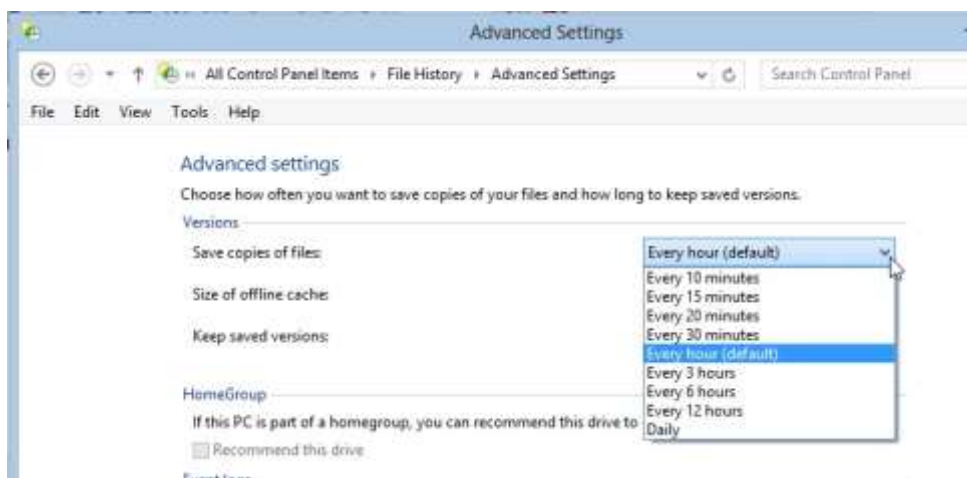


I suggest that you then click on *Advanced settings* and make the following changes:

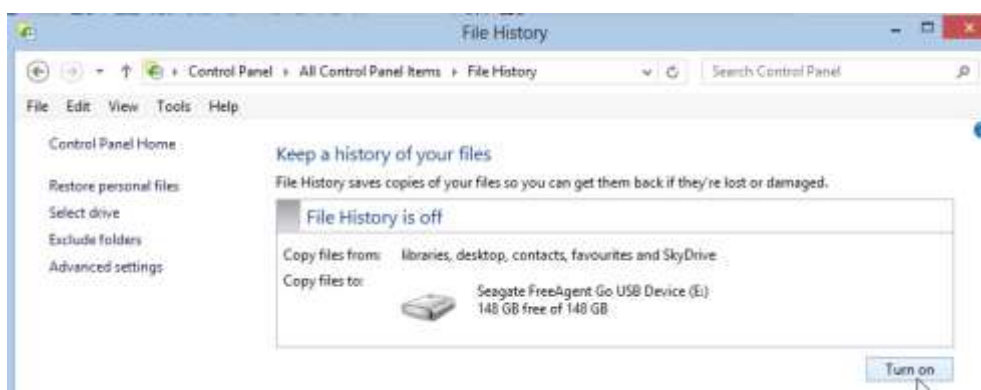
1. Set Keep saved versions to something other than Forever (otherwise the disk will eventually fill up)



2. Set the backup frequency to your choice. Note that only changed and new files are backed up with this frequency.



Then click *Turn on* to start File History operating. It will initially backup all your files then each hour (or what you selected) check for changes

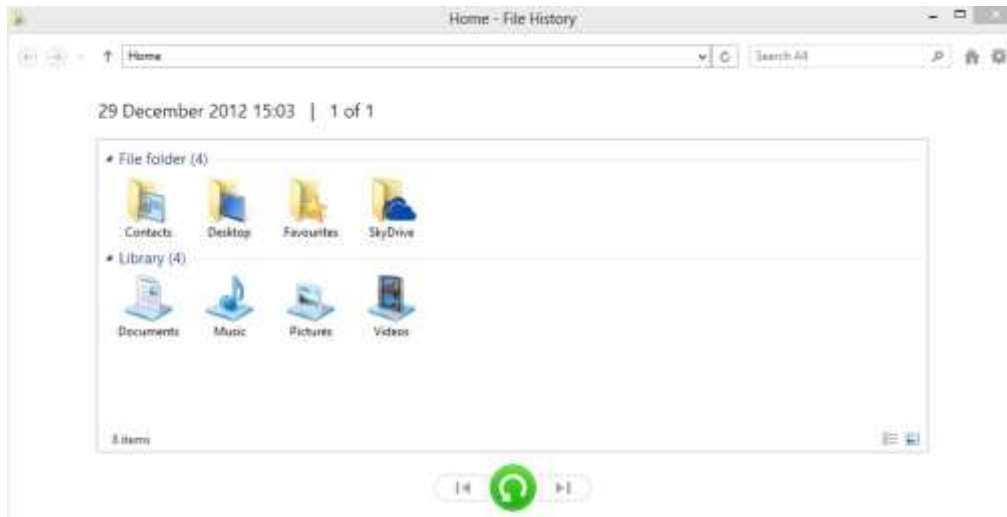


Viewing your file history

You can view *File History* on a Windows 8 computer using *File History*, where you can also restore files.

Viewing, using File History

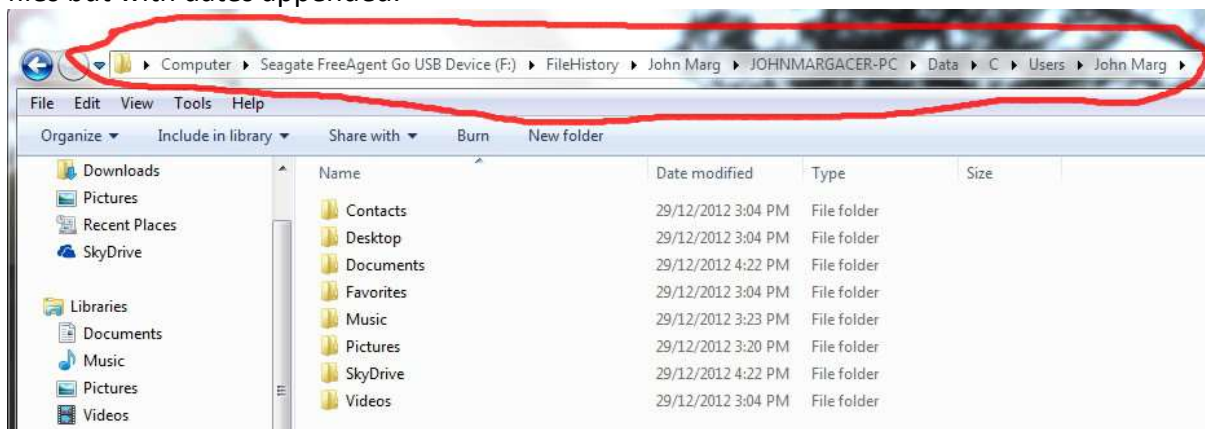
Open File Explorer and click *History*. Now you get a folder view of File History – ie the files on your local hard disk and their previous versions.



You can preview any of the files but you cannot change them. To restore a file select it and click the green arrow or right click Restore.

Viewing files directly

If you need to view your file history on a computer with an older version of Windows, open the external USB disk in Windows file explorer, double click on the *File History* folder then keep double clicking on the various computer name/user folders until you come to a folder called Data. Open the C folder then Users, then your user name and you will see all your files but with dates appended.



Viewing files using this method is OK but there is no *Restore* function, and you should not edit them. If a catastrophe has occurred and for some reason this is the only way you can view them, they can at least be copied to your main hard disk.

Warnings

- Keep your backup USB disk plugged in
- Don't include any part of the USB disk in your Documents, Pictures or Videos library – Windows will get confused
- If you delete files/reformat your backup drive or replace it, File will prompt you asking if you want to include all previously saved offline files. Select "NO" and it will perform a new full file history backup to your new or erased drive.